

THE SIR THOMAS AND LADY EDITH DIXON LECTURE

by
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Shortly after the death of Sir Thomas Dixon, Bt., I was contacted by his widow, Lady Edith Dixon. She was anxious that, as she and her husband had been so closely associated with the medical profession for so many years, something should be arranged to perpetuate this happy relationship. She proposed donating a certain amount of money, and at that time one felt that the best way to use this was to invest it and from the proceeds to finance an annual lecture, and with the honorarium there would also be a medal which we later arranged would carry on one side the Dixon coat-of-arms and on the other side the crest of the Royal Victoria Hospital.

As Sir Thomas and Lady Dixon had been so closely associated, and in fact inseparable, in their lives doing good, I insisted that the lecture should be called the Sir Thomas and Lady Edith Dixon Lecture. This perhaps explains the reason for this rather cumbersome name.

In the early stages, and for the first few years, Lady Dixon herself, although unable to go to the lecture, was always anxious to meet the lecturer, and on each occasion she gave a very elegant lunch party at Wilmot, where she entertained doctors interested in the particular subject as well as a few of her own personal friends.

The first lecture was, in fact, given by Sir Lionel Whitby, an expert in blood diseases, and it was a happy coincidence that he was able on this visit to elucidate the cause of a vague type of anaemia from which Lady Dixon was then suffering.

As years went on, Lady Dixon became increasingly blind, and so the lunch parties could no longer be continued. She decided that the best thing was to give to the fund some further money, with the wish that before each meeting the visiting speaker might be suitably entertained at a small dinner party.

There were no restrictions at all on the type of lecture, but it was felt that, since the Royal Victoria Hospital had its own eponymous lectures, and since the Queen's University was similarly well equipped, the Dixon Lecture might be given a loose attachment to the Ulster Medical Society.

The lecture has attracted very important speakers from all over the world. As far as possible, no single speciality has been allowed to monopolise it. It is a nice thought that this link between the medical profession in Ulster and these two very generous people will go on now, we hope, for ever.

Sir Thomas Dixon was the second Baronet. He was the eldest son of the late Sir Daniel Dixon, D.L., M.P. Sir Thomas was born in Groomsport in 1868—his mother sadly died in the same year. He was educated in England before returning to Belfast to enter the timber firm of Dixon—now Denny, Mott & Dixon.

In his early life Sir Thomas confined himself to business, taking no part in public affairs until in 1907, when his father died and he succeeded to the title. Now, at the age of 40, he came prominently before the public. He became in time chairman of the Belfast Harbour Board and a director of several Ulster steamship companies. He was an excellent businessman, having inherited great business acumen from his father. He made a great success of his commercial life and became a very rich man. Among his many public positions he was one of His Majesty's Privy Councillors, he was His Majesty's Lieutenant for the City of Belfast, he was a senator of the Northern Ireland Parliament, as well as a member of the Senate of Queen's University—just to mention a few.

On the other side of his life it was said there was hardly a single "good" cause, whether it was social, philanthropic or athletic, that he did not help generously with his financial support. He was particularly generous to the hospitals of this city, to the Church of Ireland, as well as to the State. He left his lovely home at Cairndhu, on the coast road near Larne, to the Northern Ireland Hospitals Authority. It was his intention that this should be a convalescent home to allow the hospital patient a full recovery period before going back to the hurly-burly of a busy life.

In all his public and private life he was supported by Lady Dixon, a daughter of a Clark of Paisley and a Smiley of Larne. As they had no family, Lady Dixon was able to throw her entire energy into philanthropic work.

Sir Thomas is always known as The First Mayor of Larne, and the large Dixon Park in Larne commemorates that event. Lady Dixon was a Freeman of the borough also. After Lady Dixon's death, their lovely house at Dunmurry was given over to the Corporation to be a home for old people, and the surrounding grounds are now a much enjoyed park and in the spring each year are resplendent with roses.

Sir Thomas was a wonderful man: a good businessman, a good administrator, a farmer, a good judge of cattle and horseflesh, but his greatest quality was his love for his fellow man and his charity. He remained a simple man all through, with a homeliness of speech and thought. He has given more than most to help this province of which he was so proud.